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Media practices and urban politics: conceptualizing the powers of the media-urban nexus*

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Abstract

The spatial imaginations of media studies and urban studies are increasingly aligned, illustrated by a growing literature on what can be identified as the media-urban nexus. This nexus has attracted scholarly interest not only as a cultural phenomenon, but also as a site of emergent political dynamics. We suggest that literature on the media-urban nexus points to the always-already present conditions of possibility for a trans-local, relational urban politics. Current conceptualizations of the politics of urbanized media however tend to fall into one of two registers: conflicts over the access to and regulation of urban media spaces; or the silent politics media inscribe into the affective textures of urban life. Both tend to envision media as instrumental supplements to politics, over-estimating the powers of 'media' within urban living. Drawing on recent uses of practice theory in media studies, we highlight how thinking of media-in-practices provides a basis for more nuanced conceptualizations of the powers of the media-urban nexus. Fully realizing this conceptualization requires that the restriction of the insights of practice theory to everyday life be lifted. An expanded view of media practices is required, one which emphasizes the coordination between organized fields of communication and everyday urbanized media practices.

Key words

communication, media, phenomenology, practice theory, space, urban politics

Word count

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(1) Introduction

Recent work in urban studies and media studies shares a set of concerns focused on how best to think about the relations between spatiality, practice, and politics. We seek to draw out what connects these two interdisciplinary fields, and what continues to distinguish them, in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the political implications of urbanized media practices. The two fields are characterized by well developed, but contrasting, spatial imaginations. In urban studies, the focus has been on the localized co-presence or gathering together of processes, practices, actors, and technologies. In media studies, the guiding concern has been for distanced spaces of communicative interaction. However, both fields display a chronic and recurring difficulty in clearly defining their object of study: both ‘the urban’ and ‘the media’ have a slipperiness that belies simple conceptual delimitation. In this respect, it is notable that as both urban studies and media studies seek to further refine and define their objects of study, a shared set of concerns between the two fields has become apparent, not least around approaches to spatial concepts. Questions of place, space and scale have taken on heightened importance in media studies (e.g. Couldry and McCarthy, 2004; Falkheimer and Jansson, 2006; Moores, 2012), while in urban studies concern has increasingly focused on concepts of relationality, connectivity and mobility which emphasize the mediated qualities of spatial objects such as places, cities, or regions (e.g. Amin and Thrift, 2002; Cochrane and Ward 2012, Massey, 2007; Magnusson, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2011; McFarlane, 2011).

This conceptual shift has in turn led to a move away from understandings of ‘urban politics’ as politics *in* the city, involving the contestation of specifically urban spaces or urban issues, towards a view in which political claims are articulated in, through and in relation to urban spaces without

necessarily being contained therein (e.g. Coward, 2012; Rodgers *et al.*, forthcoming; Magnusson, 2011; Ward *et al.*, 2011). In short, urban politics is increasingly conceptualized in terms of a more general politics *of* the city and urbanization. Urban politics is no longer necessarily thought of as restricted to a single spatial ‘scale’, but as the articulation of multiple spatialities of scale, place, networks, and flows.

This growing alignment between media and urban theory is also evident in recent research exploring what we will call ‘the media-urban nexus’ (e.g. Aurigi and De Cindo, 2008; McQuire, 2008; Georgiou, 2013). Extending beyond established interests in ‘the media’ as urban institutions, or media representations of the city, this body of research sees mediation in environmental terms, emphasizing the dispersed, pervasive and often hidden incorporation of media forms, texts, practices and technologies into everyday urban life. This environmental view has significant implications. It avoids getting caught up in definitional issues, such as what types of content, form or organization count as ‘media’, or what thresholds of scale or density must be reached for spaces to count as ‘urban’. Instead, attention is directed to the spatial *intensities* of urbanized media experience, helping to produce what counts as ‘urban’ or ‘media’ in the first place.

It is in these emergent intensities of urbanized media that many commentators find the site of distinctively new political dynamics. This is illustrated well by recent commentaries on the transurban Occupy movement, the Arab Spring and ‘London Riots’ of 2011 and more recent anti-government protests taking place in Turkey and Egypt. Though interpretations of these events have tended to one of two frames (see also Rodgers *et al.*, forthcoming) – those emphasizing the particularities of urban spaces are stages for political solidarity, contestation and conflict (Lopes de Souza and Lipietz, 2011; Sassen, 2011), and those hailing the global mediatization of protest, notably

in the use of social networking media (Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2012), but also via transnational broadcasting and professional journalism (Rinke and Roder, 2011) – they have also served as an invitation to think-through the simultaneous co-ordination of urbanized and mediated political spaces (see especially Gerbaudo, 2012). These global political dramas have unfolded ‘in the streets’ while at the same time becoming exemplars of new mediated forms of political mobilization that stretch across a whole series of sites and circuits of communication.

Our argument, however, is that understanding the co-ordination and co-implication of urbanized and mediated political spaces requires us to look beyond the spectacular examples provided by recent iconographic political events. It needs to be placed within a broader view of the phenomenology of urban politics: by this, we mean the analysis of the material and symbolic conditions of possibility for the appearance of political issues which are understood as having urbanized causes, urban locations, or calling for urban-based solutions (Barnett, forthcoming). Our argument here is that media practices have to be ascribed a more significant role in the emergence of urban politics, a role that extends beyond a traditional view of media as merely representational supplements of one sort of another.

In what follows, we elaborate on the understanding of the powers of ‘media’ that, we argue, follows from recent work on the intimate co-evolution of urban dynamics and media technologies. We do so in part by spending some time unpacking what ‘media’ in particular refers to, in order to better understand how different aspects of urbanized media practice can be seen to carry political significance. In doing so, we follow the lead of writers such as Iveson (2007) and Parkinson (2010) who, in seeking to understand the sense in which certain spaces might meaningfully be ascribed value as ‘public’, distinguish different meanings of key terms in order to better understand how they

are expressed in practice. Our focus is on reconstructing the implicit political significance of recent literature focused on the media-urban nexus. We suggest that greater care needs to be taken in ascribing political meaning to the exemplary cases of urbanized media forms upon which this literature often alights, a degree of care that requires more attention to how relations between ‘the urban’ and ‘the media’ are mediated, as it were, by practices.

While acknowledging the importance of this literature, we suggest that political interpretations of the co-implication of urban spaces and media technologies tend to fall back on one of two ‘extrinsic’ readings of the relations between media, politics, and urban life: one which privileges explicit political conflict around access to and regulation of urban media spaces; and one which uncovers the hidden or silent politics of manipulation or surveillance that are inscribed by media into the textures and rhythms of urban life. In fundamental respects, both these interpretations reflect a truncation of the political analysis of the media-urban nexus. By supposing that the political implications of urban media spaces still need to be presented via a model in which power is something deployed instrumentally in the interests of either resistance or control (cf. Allen 2003), both interpretations cut short reflection on the codependency of urban life and communicative mediation, and the potentially more modest accounts of power that this might demand.

Our argument begins with a contrapuntal reading of two recent re-interpretations of the contemporary relevance of the classic Greek *polis*: one from the broadly defined field of urban studies refracted through citizenship studies (developed by Engin Isin); and one from media studies (developed by Roger Silverstone). This contrapuntal reading allows us to illustrate the ways in which the conventional spatial imaginations of media and urban theory differ in certain respects, but how too they can overlap and inform each other in important ways. When read alongside each other,

Isin's and Silverstone's interpretations of the notion of polis indicate the need to think in terms of the double-articulation of urban politics, that is, to think about how proximate interactions and dispersed chains of cause, condition and consequence are folded together in the generation of political issues. We develop this argument by outlining the political implications of the practical mediation of urban life and media technologies, drawing on Schatzki's (2002) site ontology and in particular its distinction between dispersed and integrative practices. We argue that the insights of practice theory need to be extended to the analysis of actors often still thought of as centres of 'top-down' power or authority. This extension brings into view how media-centred professions, firms, organizations and corporations seek to negotiate and adjust to the indeterminacies of everyday urban life, and in so doing provide the conditions of possibility for issues and events to appear as matters of public concern and potential objects of political action.

(2) Finding shared space

(2a) On the phenomenology of political space

The two broad fields at the heart of our argument are already interdisciplinary, and this is reflected in the engagement we now develop through a consideration of recent texts by Engin Isin and Roger Silverstone. Engin Isin's *Being Political* (Isin, 2002) has become one of the most influential texts of the growing field of citizenship studies. Through an extended genealogy of six 'group configurations' that have historically defined Western citizenship, Isin contends that citizenship is a condition always set against various Others, who are encouraged to conduct themselves in ways that affirm the virtues of those regarded as citizens. Though *Being Political* engages a broad range of philosophical thought to rethink politics, law and the social more generally, its arguments are explicitly hinged on the figure of 'the city'. Isin's group configurations centre on instantiations of urban space, seen as the

‘difference machine’ through which historical and contemporary forms of citizenship have been delineated. From the classic Greek polis to the contemporary cosmopolis, Isin presents a conception of political space as embodied in different configurations of urban life.

Isin’s account of the polis draws together urban studies and political theory. In so doing, it illustrates some of the difficulty in making conceptual connections between fields that treat ‘space’ in conceptually distinct ways. Isin’s use of ‘the city’ is not meant to denote specific places or territorial forms but refers instead to geographically and historically contingent ‘figurations’ of being political. It draws on a non-sovereign concept of the political, in which the city is the name for the political space made apparent through the problematization of practices of inclusion, engagement and encounter by various groups (Isin, 2005, page 377; see also Magnusson 2011). Isin therefore presents ‘the city’ in phenomenological terms, in so far as it refers to the spatialization of the material and symbolic conditions of political experience. On his account, the political is experienced through the actual material arrangements of urban space, but at one and the same time also through the “discontinuous experience of expressive forms, signs and symbols, which create a cognitive space” (Isin, 2002, page 42). This phenomenological account of political space as constituted by dispersed and distanced symbolic spaces mediated through material urban spaces resonates with other accounts which regard spatially dispersed communication as intrinsically dependent on the situated mediations of material urban spaces (e.g. Bridge, 2005; Amin, 2012). In Isin’s case, one finds a conception of the polis not so much reduced to the urban scale, but one in which ‘the city’ is understood as an “entity that is simultaneously both the concentration and diffusion of acts that are political” (2005, page 377).

Isin’s account of ‘the city’ as a figure for the variable formation of political space more generally can

be fruitfully juxtaposed with the idea of the polis presented in Roger Silverstone's *Media and Morality*. Silverstone (2007) uses 'the media' as the figure of political community rather than the city, and by engaging with the work of Hannah Arendt, he discerns an emergent condition he labels 'the mediapolis'. On the one hand, this mediapolis parallels the classic Greek polis, referring to a shared space of politics or public life. On the other hand, it contrasts with the Greek polis, grounded not in the contained city-state but in the dispersed spaces created by an increasingly globalizing media; using Arendt's (1998) terminology, it is defined as a single 'space of appearance' for acting and speaking together, regardless of physical location. The mediapolis is a space that in a globalizing world has emerged as our only viable public sphere, which Silverstone presents as both an empirical condition and a normative ideal, as "both a reality and an ambition" (2007, page 186).

The notion of the mediapolis might appear to be un-situated, yet when seen within Silverstone's ethnographical approach to media (e.g. Silverstone, 1994, 1999), a different picture becomes apparent. For Silverstone, understanding media means attending to the 'domestication' of technologies within particular milieux (e.g. the home, the workplace, while mobile), as well as attending to how such domesticated technologies open up encounters in more expansive symbolic spaces. As Livingstone (2010) puts it, what Silverstone provides is a view of media space as a kind of 'double articulation' of the material and the symbolic. Silverstone (2007) suggests that the most important political dimension of media is that even as they open up potential access to a public world, making present the lives of the global Other, they do via situated conditions in which participants may maintain an almost comforting distance.

Both Isin and Silverstone are concerned with re-conceiving political space in terms of the material and symbolic conditions for experiences of interaction and engagement. We want now to delve a

little more into the spatial imaginations at work in these two accounts of politics, before elaborating the shared terrain of their respective approaches to theorizing the phenomenology of political spaces.

(2b) *Divergent and overlapping spatial imaginations*

Isin and Silverstone develop their visions of political space by drawing on distinct interdisciplinary fields. While both engage with strands of political theory, Isin does so in conjunction with insights from urban theory, while Silverstone does so by connecting with media theory. These two accounts therefore not only entail different spatial objects of analysis, the city and the media respectively, but also seemingly divergent spatial imaginaries. Isin's account of the polis, despite being based around a non-territorial reading of the city, places an emphasis on groups coming together and differences being negotiated in the physical proximities of the city, echoing a characteristic concern of urban studies. Debates on the concept of *synoecism* (or synoikism) provide one illustration of this characteristic imaginary¹. This concept conventionally refers to the amalgamation of the ancient Greek polis with surrounding smaller settlements to form unified city-states. For some writers, however, synoecism also points to the special generative powers of city life and urban spatiality, and its significance for human civilization (e.g. Jacobs 1969, Soja 2000). Synoecism in this register is an explicit version of often implicit claims about 'the urban' as a distinctive form of spatial organization. It embodies urban theory's recurring spatial frame of co-presence: the gathering together or assembly of processes, practices, actors, and technologies into localizable spatial objects identified using terms such as scale, place, town and city.

In contrast, in Silverstone's work one finds a spatial imagination that prioritizes the relations of the

situated self to the dispersed spaces of communicative interaction. This is an imagination that exemplifies well-established understandings of space in media studies, paradigmatically concerned with distanced spaces of communicative interaction. Writers such as Carey (1989, pages 201-230) and Thompson (1995, pages 31-37) have argued that the history of mediated communication is characterized by the progressive uncoupling of space and time: spatial distancing no longer necessarily implies temporal distancing; and communication no longer necessarily requires transportation. Thus, media theory has tended to focus on the social and cultural experience of ‘despatialized simultaneity’ (Thompson, 1995, page 32) or ‘the doubling of place’ (Moore, 2004). Notwithstanding Silverstone’s clear interests in the situated milieu of mediated experience, his account of mediapolis remains grounded in media theory’s dominant conception of space as a plastic configuration for variable relations of presence and absence, and above all, as a vector of dissemination and dispersal rather than gathering together (Peters, 1999).

While the distinct objects of analysis at stake in these two accounts – the urban, and the media – account for pertinent differences, there are overlapping concerns in how space is theorized. Isin’s conception of urban space resonates with the broader shift towards a non-scalar and relational vocabulary in human geography, urban studies and related fields, in which an emphasis on distribution, connectivity and mobility has become as important as that of the proximities associated with notions of locality, scale, or place (e.g. Allen and Cochrane 2010; Amin and Thrift 2002; Massey 2007; McFarlane, 2011). These emergent modes of urban thinking provide possible openings for dialogues between urban studies and media theory, in much the same way that they have afforded, for example, political theorists a way to rethink the conditions of dispersed political subjectivities and action through urban spaces (e.g. Magnusson, 2011; Coward, 2012).

Silverstone's conception of media space, meanwhile, is also indicative of a wider pluralization of how space is conceptualized in media and communications studies, often drawing on theories developed in human geography and urban studies. For example, Couldry's (2000) account of media power is concerned less with action across distance, and instead explores the production of power relations on occasions in which ordinary people and media professionals become spatially proximate. More recently, Moores (2012) has argued for an interweaving of phenomenological perspectives in media and spatial theory, arguing that media technologies do not encourage a sense of 'placelessness' but rather potentially provide the conditions for stronger attachments to place. Such connections have even led some to suggest media studies is undergoing its own spatial turn (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004; Falkheimer and Jansson, 2006).

While starting from different positions, Isin's and Silverstone's accounts of the polis are indicative of important shifts in how urban and media, as objects of study, are conceptualized in their respective fields. Both writers present what is effectively a phenomenological account of political space, in terms of the variable spatial configurations that make possible the experience of and exposure to shared communities of interest. Both understand the polis as always-already encountered and engaged through situated material and symbolic environments. Isin and Silverstone are both concerned with the simultaneity of concentration and dispersal through particular situated contexts (e.g. the city, domestic space), and with how these contexts become integral scenes for the constitution of political space. Thus, political communication and public address are always already configured by material conditions of mediation (Carpignano, 1999, page 184; see also Barnett 2003, Iveson, 2007). And in turn the practical qualities of these material conditions are shaped by the complex 'technological ecology' of urban experience (see Wasiak, 2009). Reading these two conceptions of the polis alongside each other bring into view an understanding of media-related

practices and technologies as fundamental conditions of possibility for any translocal politics ‘of’ urban spaces, which exceeds a politics ‘in’ the city. In the next section, we explore in more depth the political implications of this interweaving of media and the urban experience.

(3) Locating politics in the media-urban nexus

In order to develop a more focused understanding of how the imbrication of media in the fabric of urban life might be considered to have political significance, in this section we elaborate on two related themes: first, on how media have been conceptualized as intrinsic to urban life; and second, how the powers that are enacted through this media-urban nexus need to be conceptualized in light of the practical mediation not just of everyday life but of more formal, organized fields of action as well. In traditional approaches to urban politics, media appear as an *extrinsic* variable to the urban. This is the case in two longstanding traditions of analysis: political economy approaches that theorize ‘the media’ and particularly newspapers as part of a family of elite institutions which shape a territorialized politics of cities (e.g. Logan and Molotch, 1987; Davis, 1990; Cox, 1999); and culturalist approaches that focus on media as a field for producing and circulating representations of cities and urban issues (e.g. Beauregard, 2003; Greenberg, 2008; Hunt, 2002). These longstanding traditions constrain the potential to think through the political significance of the media-urban nexus in so far as they rely upon a limited sense of ‘the media’ as representational mediums – either representing particular political interests; or as disseminators of symbolic representations. In both respects, media are seen as *merely* re-presenting a pre-existing world of interests and ideologies.

In contrast to this extrinsic view of media, there is a growing body of research that focuses upon the ways in which media forms and technologies are literally ‘built into’ urban spaces. For example,

McQuire's (2008) notion of a 'media-architecture complex' seeks to move beyond the presentism of recent writing on the 'informational', 'digital' or 'networked' city (see Castell 1989, Laguerre 2005, Mitchell, 2003), in order to think through the much deeper historical intertwining of media within the urban experience. McQuire (2008) presents, for example, the introduction of electric illumination itself as a form of mediation, which made possible a wide range of urban practices previously considered impossible or unsafe. The example of illumination challenges conventional understandings of 'the media' as a discrete set of institutions, symbolic practices or technologies primarily concerned with producing representations of one sort of another. Inspired by McLuhan's (1964) renowned observation that electronic light is a 'medium without content', McQuire underscores how various media provide *environments* for action. On this understanding, of urban illumination as a form of media, there is no need to restrict observations to the symbolic complexity of urban illumination, for example in the deployment of dynamic digital screens across buildings and public spaces. Rather, illumination helps to make possible a whole host of urbanized practices, for example nightlife and nightshifts (see Straw, 2014). The relevance of this analysis of old 'new' media is that it directs our attention to how new 'new media' help to reorder and reconfigure not just specific symbolic fields of, for example, photography, or film, or writing, but also whole fields of urbanized practice in which these media forms and cultures are embedded.

McQuire's notion of a media-architecture complex highlights the degree to which media technologies and practices are *intrinsic* to the urban experience. One prominent line of inquiry opened up by this broadened sense of media is the ways in which urban surfaces frequently operate as mediums of communication. This has a long history: Henkin (1998), for example, argues that the proliferation of signs and notices in mid-nineteenth Century New York constituted as much a form of 'public reading' as newspapers during the same period. In contemporary cities, there is seemingly

increased competition for and contradictions within urban surface spaces, reflected in academic analyses of the commoditized rhythms of outdoor advertising (Cronin, 2010), the dynamic information of digitized urban screens (McQuire et al., 2009; Krajina, 2014), or the subversive spaces of graffiti and street art (Austin, 2010; Halsey and Pederick, 2010). For some, urban surfaces need not necessarily contain communicative ‘content’ at all: so, for example, McKim (2008) has argued that the very design of urban spaces, such as the Ground Zero memorial, can operate as a form of political communication without content.

Similar themes to those underpinning the media-architecture complex can be seen in recent efforts at the junction of urban and software studies to provide a more holistic reformulation of often hyperbolic depictions of ‘the digital city’. Rather than primarily finding ‘digitized’ urban spaces in computer-generated visualizations, virtual communities or augmented reality, such approaches have instead examined the more general pervasiveness of urban media infrastructures supported by software code and its related computation technologies. This work seeks therefore to go beyond the symbolic complexities of digital representation as such, and instead attend to how urban experience increasingly involves the use and encounter of a huge range of mundane technologies (e.g. automobiles, car park barriers, building security systems, local authority databases, card payment devices) that are inconceivable without the quiet and little noticed instructions of software code (Aurigi and De Cindio, 2008; Kitchin and Dodge, 2011; Thrift and French, 2002).

The ways in which ‘code’ ubiquitously configures urban life is one exemplary issue around which the politics of the media-urban nexus has been conceptualized. By its nature, software code remains concealed, for example behind increasingly intuitive user interfaces, ambient geo-location capacities and relatively unremarkable automated street infrastructure. Software code can be seen as a type of

textual artifact, in so far as it is a specialized language written by programmers, but its practical and technical enactment does not involve an act of decoding (Berry 2011, page 29). There is, rather, a deferred relationship between spaces of software programming and software-in-action. For some commentators, this leads to the argument that there is a *duplicity* to software code. Code appears both as a language for human programmers primarily interested in its content, and as a secreted element of the operations of complex digital systems (see Graham *et al*, 2013). Kitchin and Dodge (2011) refer to this as the ‘secondary agency’ of code, which operates autonomously from human use or authorization (cf. Mackenzie, 2006). Software mediates urban life, then, not through one-way ‘instructions’ between human programmers and computational machines, but via a two-way process of translation and transduction (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011). It thereby introduces new forms of computationally-produced memory, connection and anticipation into the syntax of urban space, and on stronger readings, perhaps even new forms of urban sentience (Shepard, 2011).

The literatures on the media-architecture complex and urbanized software generate certain problems of political interpretation, which require some elaboration. There are two prevalent registers in the political evaluation of how media forms are built into such urban spaces. In the first of these registers, the focus is upon how aspects of pervasively mediated urban environments are made explicit objects of political debate and conflict. Examples include debates around how the regulatory normalization of graffiti potentially undermines its artistic and political legitimacy (Young, 2010; Halsey and Pederick, 2010); the threat that public-private arrangements, in which outdoor media owners agree to provide urban street furniture, poses for a democratic media landscape (Iveson, 2012); or the ambiguous success of campaigns for publicly-accessible urban WiFi networks (Powell, 2008). In each of these cases, the focus is on the more or less conventional forms of politics that surround the development of pervasive media environments, such as lobbying, campaigning and

mobilization. In the second register, the focus is on the implicit politics of mediated urban experience over time and space. On this view, the pervasive mediation of urban architectures and infrastructures raises political questions precisely because they are not made explicit, but remain hidden, automated, sensual and therefore placed beyond the scope of deliberation and critique. It suggests that by enabling surreptitious, pervasive surveillance and by inculcating certain emotions or affects (e.g. happiness, loathing, enchantment, anxiousness, panic), mediated urban environments are necessarily political (see Amin and Thrift 2002, Amin and Thrift 2013).

One register emphasizes explicit conflicts and reasoning between self-conscious actors over the use and design of spaces; the other emphasizes the silent presence of power-relations and path-dependencies built or encoded into urban architectures and infrastructures. While both provide highly nuanced accounts of the pervasive presence of media technologies in urban life, each also has a tendency is to read-off politics from observations of particular media forms or infrastructural arrangements. Both approaches therefore remain somewhat one-sided in their attention to ways in which technologies, forms and infrastructures enact or configure human practices. What is needed is a more rounded sense of media as embedded in urbanized practices, one that de-centers the determinant power of media technologies to enact political relationships for either good or ill effects.

We suggest that a nuanced analysis of the political significance of the emergent media-urban nexus requires a fuller engagement with recent literature that develops a phenomenological account of media practices. Thinking in terms of ‘media practices’ emerges most prominently from the ethnographic tradition of audience research in media and cultural studies. Ethnographic audience studies mark a shift from understanding media in terms of its effects or functional role, towards

attending to the contingent interweaving of media into the various practical environments of ‘everyday life’ (see Bird, 2003). The concept that best captures this interweaving of media within routinized urban environments is ‘domestication’. This refers to the ways in which once-novel technologies eventually become mere appliances within established everyday practices, hierarchies and spaces. Studies of media domestication have focused especially on how television and radio have become near-invisible aspects of family life, which is seen to subsist in and through the home environment, and in turn connect these environments to more dispersed social constellations (see Morley, 2000; Moores, 2000; Nansen *et al*, 2011). Here we can reconnect to Silverstone’s doubly-articulated media space: the history of radio and television involves a complex negotiation of intimate spaces of the home with the public realm, a negotiation exemplified by the characteristic ‘for-anyone-as-someone’ phenomenology of broadcasting cultures (Scannell, 2000). For Silverstone (1994, pages 52-77), understanding the embeddedness of media in everyday practices, and the configuration of those practices by media, opens up an analysis of television in particular as a distinctly ‘suburban’ medium, in both its material and symbolic guises.

The concept of domestication does not however refer solely to the privatized urban spaces of ‘the home’ or suburbia or to ‘domestic’ technologies such as the television. It is of more general conceptual purchase, referring to the process through which once ‘wild’ technologies become ‘tamed’ through their embedding in routine practices (Helle-Valle and Sletteameås, 2008). In this sense, the concept of media domestication invites us to think about the ways in which media are dispersed across a wide range of practices inherent to urban life. McCarthy (2001), for example, takes television out of the home environment and explores its proliferation across a series of mundane sites, such as bars, cafes, airport gates, and doctors’ waiting areas. Berland (2009, pages 185-209; see also Bull, 2004) has highlighted radio’s adaptation into new niches of urban life not well

addressed by other media, such as driving practices. Bull (2007) has made similar arguments about how personal sound devices, such as mp3 players, have become important for coping with everyday urban life (e.g. counteracting its sensory overload, its boredom, its strangers) or audibly augmenting its aesthetic experience.

These examples focus on practical activity rather than media *per se*, that is, on what people do with media. It is an approach that has also informed literature on digitally mediated urban life. There is a growing body of research, for example, on the various ways in which mobile and location-aware media are shifting the routine negotiation of urban spaces (e.g. de Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012; Gordon and de Souza e Silva, 2011; Hampton and Gupta, 2008; Humphreys and Liao, 2011). This literature certainly has a strong interest in the constellations of technical devices (e.g. smart phones, tablet computers, netbooks) and infrastructures (e.g. mobile telecommunications, WiFi networks, the satellite-based Global Positioning System) that enable location awareness. But it is interested above all in how location comes to matter through practical media use. For example, when de Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) speak of location-aware media as an ‘interface’ with urban public space, they are referring not only to the technical interface *per se* (e.g. a keypad or touch screen), but also to how such technologies both amplify and disrupt existing practical norms of being in public. Using such technologies might, for example, make it easier to geolocate oneself in relation to nearby amenities or friends, while at the same time attenuating one’s attentiveness to their immediate surroundings, or conflicting with friends’ expectations of privacy.

The common thread linking these strands of research on urbanized media routines is the de-centering of both media in general and ‘the media’ as a set of organizations from the analysis of the relationship between media and action. In a recent call for a phenomenological approach to media

and spatial experience, Moores (2012) goes so far as to suggest that this approach represents a ‘non-media centric media studies’, one that begins from the conditions of everyday experience rather than the characteristics of a particular medium. In a similar vein, Couldry (2004; 2012) argues that in the wake of ethnographic audience studies there has been a clear turn to theorizing media as practice. Couldry’s invocation of ‘practices’ connects with theorizations of social practices both recent (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki *et al*, 2001, Warde, 2005) and more established (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990). This leads to an argument that we should conceive of ‘media’ not “as objects, texts, apparatuses of perception or production processes” (Couldry 2012, page 35), but rather as phenomena that emerge through localized contexts of practical action. Such a conceptualization of media-in-practices directs attention away from the measurement or theorization of media ‘effects’ on behavior. It also moves us beyond the idea of thinking of ‘the media’ simply as discrete representational actors in urban politics, shaping agendas or circulating ideological or affective states of mind. Understanding media as embedded in practices in this way leads to an analytical focus on open-ended questions such as “what types of things do people do in relation to media? And what types of things do people say in relation to media?” (Couldry, 2004: 121).

Focusing conceptually on media-in-practices is an important shift in emphasis towards understanding how media environments are constituted through various forms of practical activity, rather than simply providing the contexts for such activity. In so far as practices are understood to comprise tacit, embodied and unconscious as well as expressed, intentional and self-conscious activities, this practice-centered understanding can help reconceptualize the implicit and explicit relations of power enacted through pervasive mediated urban environments. However, to fully realize this potential, practice needs to be freed from the restriction often imposed on the concept, whereby it presumed to refer only to everyday, routine styles of action.

It remains the case that much of the work on urbanized media routines, including Couldry's conception of media-related practices, continues to invest in the value of 'the everyday' as a fluid and indeterminate domain (see Hobart 2010; Rodgers, 2013). While such a focus has allowed for accounts of emerging user-generated media production practices, organized and more exclusionary fields of media production are left looking as if they stand outside of the arena of practice, conceptualized as a structural domain still best analyzed with the tools of political economy. They inhabit one level of analysis, presumed to be strategically coherent and fully rationalized, set-off against the more indeterminate field of everyday practices. We suggest that this restriction of the insights of practice theory to the everyday needs to be lifted, so that institutionalized media activities – for example producing television, designing software, or making the news – are also understood as organized-yet-everyday practical fields in their own right. This extension is crucial to a nuanced understanding of how media is related to the practices of urban politics. In the next section, we argue that the relationship between urban politics and media needs to be located in the analysis of formalized fields of media practice as they are *articulated in relation to* the indeterminacies of everyday practice.

(4) Expanding the domain of media-related practices and the city

While the 'practice turn' in media studies places an important emphasis on the intersection of media and action, it tends to do so with a highly attenuated attention toward media in everyday life. But there is no necessary reason to limit the emphasis on practice to the everyday or the informal. We will argue here that the value of a phenomenological imagination to the analysis of media practices lies in throwing new light on the ways in which the 'production' of media content and forms

involves a contingent negotiation with and anticipation of the spaces and values of everyday life. What is required is a focus on an expanded domain of media-related practices in and through urban contexts which can attend equally to the practical configuration of large-scale regimes, actors, institutions and fields as well as practices of everyday sociability (see Schatzki, 2011; also cf. DeLanda, 2006).

In order to develop an understanding of this expanded domain, we draw on Schatzki's (2002) ontology of 'sites'. For Schatzki, practices depend on the material capacities, agency and distribution of human bodies, technologies, nonhuman organisms, objects and things. Yet via a sympathetic critique of similar work, particularly actor-network theory (e.g. Latour, 1993; Law, 1994) but also posthumanism (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and science and technology studies (e.g. Pickering, 1995), Schatzki makes a distinct argument for an *analytical* priority on practices. Without losing sight of, for example, the material arrangement of laptop computers, wireless signals, human bodies, tables, chairs, coffee, and a busy street scene visible through a window, Schatzki's approach would suggest we direct our analytical attention to how it is that such arrangements are made practically legible as, for example, freelance media work in the coffee shop.

The issue of how material arrangements are made practically legible, that is, how they become available as the scenes for action, is central to Schatzki's expanded conception of practices. Practical action includes not only, for example, the complex articulations of hand movements vis-à-vis a mouse or eye movements vis-à-vis a screen, even though this fine grain of practical action is very important. It also includes how such actions are positioned in relation to more abstracted practical configurations experienced as larger-scale 'social' entities, fields and orders (see especially Schatzki, 2011). In this respect, Schatzki (2002) shares some ground with Bourdieu's (1990) account of social

fields, as well as Boltanski's and Thévenot's (2006) account of the justificatory practices through which social fields are coordinated. Schatzki articulates his sense of how practices are socially 'positioned' by making a distinction between *dispersed* and *integrative* practices. *Dispersed practices* are defined by 'doings', that is, embodied understandings of how to do things; and by 'sayings', that is, situated and explicit statements relating how to do something or that something is the case. They are the open-ended features of many activities, and might include 'simple' actions such as describing, listening, handwriting or typing. They are echoed in Couldry's (2004) core questions related to media practices, that is, what do people do and say in relation to media. *Integrative practices*, by contrast, involve the ordering of many dispersed practices, bound together and made intelligible by more abstract normative ends and emotions shared amongst those performing the practice. General examples might include cooking, motoring, engineering or being a football fan. In turn, dispersed practices are basic constituents of integrative practices (see Schatzki, 2002, pages 242-243). So, for example, the basic competencies of everyday media literacy, such as recognizing media genres, watching and listening to radio or television, or reading, are dispersed practices that, in different combinations, are bundled into integrative practices such as informed citizenship, or childcare, or friendship.

The distinction between dispersed and integrative practices provides the outlines for a practice-based account of how formal, 'large-scale' media-related professions, firms, collectivities, organizations and corporations persist in, through and in relation to urban environments. It enables us to return to the question of 'the media' – albeit a term with considerable baggage (see Couldry, 2009; Bennett *et al*, 2011) – in order to conceptualize urban politics alongside the pervasive, dispersed, practically oriented phenomenology of mediated urban life. For example, Cronin (2010) provides an account of how outdoor advertising firms 'practice' the city, in their

market research, as well as in their creation and installation of various forms and spaces of outdoor advertising. Outdoor advertising firms recursively attempt to tap into and re-perform the energies of everyday urban life, such as commuting. McQuire's (2010) discussion of the BBC 'Big Screens' project provides another example of this responsive, dependent relationship between integrated media practices and dispersed urban routines. He highlights the BBC's successes and difficulties in aligning its public broadcasting ethos with everyday experiences of public togetherness in British cities. Finally, and drawing explicitly on practice theory, Rodgers' (2013) research on the *Toronto Star* analyzes the relationship of the newsroom and urban publicness. Rather than seeing the newsroom simply as a powerful site for the outward projection of mediated representations upon the city, Rodgers shows how the newsroom's places, rhythms and technologies are a material manifestation of practical news work's orientation to always-already existing dynamics and concerns of urban life. These examples illustrate the degree to which 'the media', that is, large-scale organizations often ascribed considerable determinant power in shaping the agendas of urban and national politics alike, have to attune themselves in fundamental ways to the rhythms, routines and imperatives of dynamic urban processes.

Any political interpretation of the pervasive mediation of small and unnoticed aspects of urban living needs to be placed alongside an understanding of the practical coordination of apparently larger, 'structural' or more strategic forms of urban media. Acknowledging the degree to which 'the media' are also a series of practically-coordinated fields, embedded in the changing rhythms and dynamics of urban life, throws into question the forms of urban political efficacy often reserved for media practices such as those related to news, advertising or public relations. Once such practical fields are seen as intrinsic rather than extrinsic to an urban politics, it becomes apparent that media are much less open to instrumental deployment by either powerful actors or

oppositional movements than is sometimes supposed. In short, if media are pervasive in urban life, then this implies that the 'power' of media and the media might be more dependent on than determinant of the composition and values of everyday life.

In making the conceptual shift we are suggesting, the ways in which the 'powers' of media are thought of are transformed. Media are no longer conceptualized or implied as a set of discrete actors, texts or technologies that stand outside of routine practices, acting to set agendas or interpellate subjects or manipulate habits (see Barnett 2008). We have suggested, instead, that media be conceptualized in terms of bundles of dispersed and integrative practices that are routinely aligned and adjusted to the rhythms and affects of the urban everyday which they in turn help to configure. Amongst other things, this is a view that leads to a much more modest view of the power of media forms, texts, practices or organizations. It suggests instead that in so far as organized agencies of authority, such as political parties, or media organizations, or state actors, or social movements, are embedded in and seek to intervene in mediated circuits of communication, then they are highly dependent on the capacity to adjust to changing configurations of urban life.

(5) Conclusion

It is increasingly common to present the complex tapestry of contemporary mediascapes as distinctly urbanized, creating a vast background and foreground of knowledge and feeling that constitutes contemporary urban life. We have sought to draw out the ways in which various strands of research interpret the 'political' implications of these mediated conditions for the phenomenology of urban experience. We have suggested that there are two prominent readings of the politics of

pervasive urban media: one which concerns explicit conflicts or mobilization around urban media architectures and infrastructures; another which focuses on the ‘silent politics’ associated with the inscription of media forms and technologies into urban environments. Even though both readings affirm more holistic understandings of what constitutes urban media, they nevertheless tend to fall back on an ‘extrinsic’ or instrumental view of media and urban life when it comes to the task of political interpretation. We have argued that this tendency can be avoided by developing an expanded view of media-related practices, one that does not restrict a practice-based analysis to the realm of the everyday, but extends to the ongoing practical configuration of media-related professions, firms, collectivities, organizations and corporations. And we have suggested that the consequence of this expanded view is that while on the one hand it brings into view a broader array of actors in the field of urban politics, it does so in such a way that challenges interpretations of the politics of everyday urban practices as straightforwardly open to manipulation, fine-tuning, or reconfiguration by powerful, centralized sites of authority.

By rearticulating the media-urban nexus through the expanded lens of practice theory, we have sought to forefront media practices as objects, environments and fields that are the conditions of possibility for the sorts of politics that takes place in and/or in relation to urban spaces. We argue that this reorientation has the potential to draw together media and urban studies as ways for thinking about urban politics anew, along two major dimensions. First, conceptualized as forms, technologies and organizations interwoven with practices of everyday urban life, media can be understood as constitutive of the phenomenological conditions of communicative practice in general. Above all, the literature on the media-urban nexus is characterized by the idea that urban environments intensify media forms and their circulations. Urban space, in other words, brings together multiple media forms and technologies, such as screens, billboards, CCTV cameras and

wireless networks, as well as multiple media practices such as automobile listening, airport television viewing, mobile texting, and reading online news over a lunch break. At the same time, as part of the same processes, urban environments also represent an intensification of professional and semi-professional media practices and organizations. In both respects, we should see media – as both intrinsic aspects in the rhythms and material settings of daily urban life, and as urban-based professional and semi-professional fields – as forming the basic conditions for the emergence of public issues, for the identification of political claims, affinities, and solidarities, often extending beyond specific, localized urban settings.

Second, understood as an arrangement of integrated practices of symbolic and technical production and distribution, ‘the media’ can be seen as intrinsic to the appearance of ‘the urban’ as a variable object of political experience, attention and concern (see Cochrane 2007). This is illustrated by the links Robert Park (1923) made between journalism and urban life (see also Lindner, 1996). Park argued that the newspaper could be seen as form that emerged from an emergent awareness of and interest in what was a new type of common urban world on an unprecedented scale. For Park, the experience of urban life demanded new practices of reading and writing which not only generated “a second-hand metropolis which gave a narrative to the concrete one and choreographed its encounters” (Fritzsche, 1996, page 1), but also made it possible to conceive of and speak for ‘the urban’ as political space. Twenty-first century urbanism is marked by a further proliferation of media-related practices and technologies for not only reading and writing about, but also visualizing, imaging, mapping, sensing and geolocating urban space. These new practices and technologies are not just mediums of everyday urban experience, but also mediums for the production of normatively differentiated public accounts of urban life that are made available through dispersed media practices. Thinking through organized fields of media-related practices invites an analysis of the

media-related objects, environments and fields through which grievances, interests, and problems show up in the world as specifically urban, and how cities become identified as spaces or agents of political will-formation, allocation, and decision-making.

Combining these two dimensions, we have sought to present a broader view of media than is often acknowledged in conventional accounts of urban politics. At the same time, by conceptualizing media in terms of practices, we have presented an argument that demands a less media-centric view of the contributions of media to the dynamics of urban politics than might be supposed. Rather than presenting media as various forms of exteriorized agency, we have taken an environmental view of both media and the media as necessarily implicated in the material and symbolic conditions of possibility for the appearance of politics understood as urban in either basis, causation or location.

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Notes

¹ Isin himself (2002, pages 5-22) also discusses the concept of synoecism at length. His focus however is a critique of Weber's use of the concept to join the Occidental city with that of citizenship, rather than its purchase for understanding urbanism.